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LATEST PLANT QUARANTINE LAW PROVES A 'LEMON'

By C. S. ALBERT

[Special Star-Bulletin Correspondence]
WASHINGTON, D. C., Nov. 28.—After working for more than three years to induce Congress to pass a plant quarantine law, the Department of Agriculture finds that it has been given the same old variety of "lemon," in the way of a regulation done up in a fairly elaborate wrapping. The federal horticultural board has been struggling for about two months to get the enactment in working order, but is decidedly up against it owing to the careful restrictions that Congress has placed around the law. It is realized by the scientists who have the subject in hand that it is hopeless to get any change made at the coming short session of Congress, but there is some hope that in the next Congress some changes in the law may be made that will make it more practical.

Canada has a plant quarantine law that apparently works well and is absolutely simple. There are certain ports named where plants may be imported. Here there are inspectors, and if they find a shipment that is diseased or infected it is turned back. If they give it a clean bill of health it is allowed to pass into the country, and the material may be shipped anywhere and nothing more heard of it. U. S. Officials wonder.

The new law that Congress has passed does not work that way. The Department of Agriculture is not allowed to make inspections at the ports and stop an infected shipment. It is merely allowed to report to the various states that such a shipment has been received and the state is supposed to look after the individual packages after the shipment is split up and sent to the private purchasers anywhere in the interior.

Even this rather roundabout plan would work fairly well if all the states had a plant inspection service. Some of them have a very efficient service. In some it is not so good and some have none at all. In less than two months since the law has been working there have been two shipments that contained eggs of the gypsy moth, a tree pest that already has cost New England several million dollars. Fortunately the shipments went to a state where there was a good system of state inspection, but if they had gone to a state where there was no such system the first that would have been known of the pest would have been when there was a new focus of infection established that it would have cost at least a million dollars to wipe out, if it could have been done at all.

Congress has provided very little money for the enforcement of the new law, and the Treasury Department has so ruled that no money, even for clerk hire, can be spent in Washington, where the bulk of the work has to be done. As the work is very largely clerical, it places the board in a rather embarrassing position.

It is stated in the department that the reason such a patchwork law was passed was from the opposition of a lot of the big plant importers. There are a number of such firms, principally in New York, who are not nurserymen at all, but merely plant brokers, and all they care about is getting plants into the country and selling them through the various states. The experts say that five ports of entry for plant shipments would amply cover the whole country—say, New York, Baltimore, New Orleans, San Francisco and Seattle. With efficient inspectors there, infected shipments could be turned back or destroyed. As it is, all the plant broker has to do is to get a certificate of inspection from the country of origin that the plants are clean.

Experience is proving that many of these certificates are absolutely worthless, and if infected plants go to a state where there is no inspection immense damage is likely to result at any moment.

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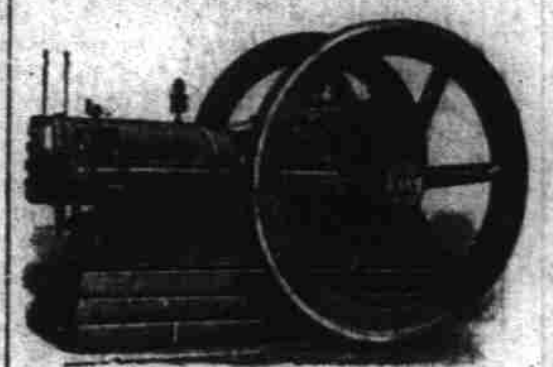
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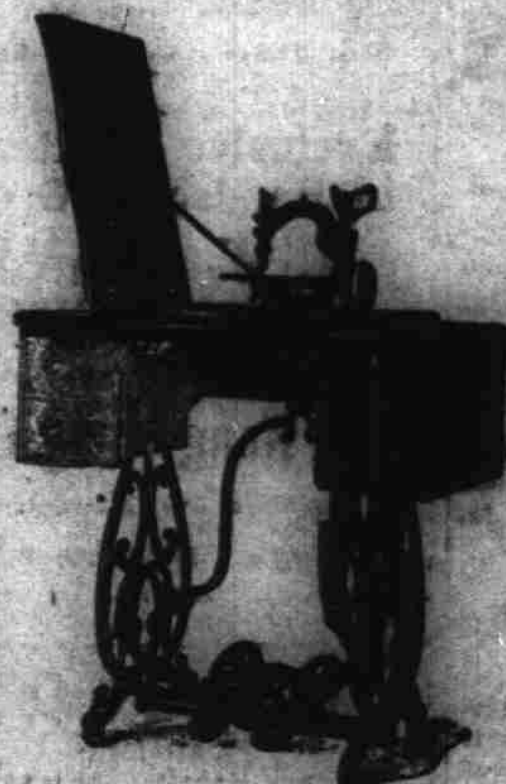
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2703, 2704, 2705, 2706, 2707, 2708, 2709, 2710, 2711, 2712, 2713, 2714, 2715, 2716, 2717, 2718, 2719, 2720, 2721, 2722, 2723, 2724, 2725, 2726, 2727, 2728, 2729, 2730, 2731, 2732, 2733, 2734, 2735, 2736, 2737, 2738, 2739, 2740, 2741, 2742, 2743, 2744, 2745, 2746, 2747, 2748, 2749, 2750, 2751, 2752, 2753, 2754, 2755, 2756, 2757, 2758, 2759, 2760, 2761, 2762, 2763, 2764, 2765, 2766, 2767, 2768, 2769, 2770, 2771, 2772, 2773, 2774, 2775, 2776, 2777, 2778, 2779, 2780, 2781, 2782, 2783, 2784, 2785, 2786, 2787, 2788, 2789, 2790, 2791, 2792, 2793, 2794, 2795, 2796, 2797, 2798, 2799, 2800, 2801, 2802, 2803, 2804, 2805, 2806, 2807, 2808, 2809, 2810, 2811, 2812, 2813, 2814, 2815, 2816, 2817, 2818, 2819, 2820, 2821, 2822, 2823, 2824, 2825, 2826, 2827, 2828, 2829, 2830, 2831, 2832, 2833, 2834, 2835, 2836, 2837, 2838, 2839, 2840, 2841, 2842, 2843, 2844, 2845, 2846, 2847, 2848, 2849, 2850, 2851, 2852, 2853, 2854, 2855, 2856, 2857, 2858, 2859, 2860, 2861, 2862, 2863, 2864, 2865, 2866, 2867, 2868, 2869, 2870, 2871, 2872, 2873, 2874, 2875, 2876, 2877, 2878, 2879, 2880, 2881, 2882, 2883, 2884, 2885, 2886, 2887, 2888, 2889, 2890, 2891, 2892, 2893, 2894, 2895, 2896, 2897, 2898, 2899, 2900, 2901, 2902, 2903, 2904, 2905, 2906, 2907, 2908, 2909, 2910, 2911, 2912, 2913, 2914, 2915, 2916, 2917, 2918, 2919, 2920, 2921, 2922, 2923, 2924, 2925, 2926, 2927, 2928, 2929, 2930, 2931, 2932, 2933, 2934, 2935, 2936, 2937, 2938, 2939, 2940, 2941, 2942, 2943, 2944, 2945, 2946, 2947, 2948, 2949, 2950, 2951, 2952, 2953, 2954, 2955, 2956, 2957, 2958, 2959, 2960, 2961, 2962, 2963, 2964, 2965, 2966, 2967, 2968, 2969, 2970, 2971, 2972, 2973, 2974, 2975, 2976, 2977, 2978, 2979, 2980, 2981, 2982, 2983, 2984, 2985, 2986, 2987, 2988, 2989, 2990, 2991, 2992, 2993, 2994, 2995, 2996, 2997, 2998, 2999, 3000, 3001, 3002, 3003, 3004, 3005, 3006, 3007, 3008, 3009, 3010, 3011, 3012, 3013, 3014, 3015, 3016, 3017, 3018, 3019, 3020